



Testimony
SB 297
House Transportation Committee
June 6, 2006

My name is Arlene Gorelick, and I am President of the Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan. The Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan, founded in 1948, is the only statewide non-profit organization that focuses entirely on seizure disorders. Our mission is to "empower people with epilepsy to live productive lives". The Foundation is a separately incorporated affiliate of the national Epilepsy Foundation.

The Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan opposes Senate Bill 297, which would remove the protections of mandatory motorcycle helmets.

About 25 percent of all cases of epilepsy are attributed to some kind of injury to the head. Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of head injuries--about 50-60 percent in most studies. Epilepsy occurs in 2-5 percent of those who have had a head injury. Nationally, about 5,000 new cases of epilepsy are attributed to head injury each year.

The Epilepsy Foundation of Michigan is concerned about preventing accidents because of their relationship to the risk of developing epilepsy, which can be the result of some kind of trauma to the head. For that reason, the Epilepsy Foundation has long been a proponent of safety devices, including automobile safety belts, motorcycle helmets and bicycle helmets, and safe use of boats, motorcycles, and other recreational vehicles.

The evidence in support of helmet use is overwhelming. Head injury is the leading cause of death in motorcycle crashes. A motorcyclist is 16 times more likely to die in a crash than an automobile driver. Head injuries are the leading cause of death in motorcycle accidents, and riders without helmets are 40 percent more likely to sustain a fatal head injury.

- Statistics show that in states where helmets are not required, only 50 percent of motorcyclists wear them. Unhelmeted motorcyclists are over three times as likely to suffer a brain injury when compared to those motorcyclists that wear helmets.
- The GAO reviewed 46 studies of motorcycle helmets and helmet laws and reported helmeted riders have up to a 73 percent lower fatality rate than unhelmeted riders. In addition, helmeted riders have up to an 85 percent reduced incidence of severe, serious, and critical injuries than unhelmeted riders. The GAO concluded, "Because there is convincing evidence that helmets save lives and reduce society's burden of caring for injured riders, Congress may wish to consider encouraging states to enact and retain universal helmet laws."



- According to a recent University of Michigan study, *"Helmet use decreased the cost of hospitalization by more than \$6,000 per patient. Failure to wear a helmet adds to the financial burden created by motorcycle-related injuries."*
- Helmet laws that apply only to young or inexperienced drivers are not effective in reducing death rates. Research has shown that, in those states where helmet laws apply only to young drivers, death rates from head injuries remain twice as high as in states where laws are universal - applying to all drivers. For example, the Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) data shows that younger riders (25-34 years old) incur both the greatest number of motorcycle fatalities in Michigan and the highest level of non-compliance with the state's mandatory helmet law.
- The Michigan Catastrophic Claims Association (MCCA) reports that although fewer than 2 percent of all registered motor vehicles in Michigan are motorcycles, 6.2 percent of all reported claims are from motorcyclists.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committee on these important issues.